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ABSTRACT

Middle school and junior high school language arts students can receive a basic background in the elements of theatrical production and an appreciation of the theatre arts by producing and performing one act plays. A six- or seven-week unit can progress from the basics of pantomime, reading and vocabulary, and characterization with make-up, through blocking and rehearsing, set and costume construction, and lighting, to performances, striking the set, and an "Academy Awards" ceremony. Various activities related to production will enhance spelling, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and analytical thinking and writing skills. The unit can be evaluated by students with a weekly assessment of each other's performance of responsibilities. Students who generally have difficulty with the language arts can meet with success in a drama unit, and all students may develop a lifelong interest in and an appreciation for the theatre. This kind of activity can also generate media coverage, resulting in increased interest and support from the community. (Appendixes include a try out sheet, language arts and writing exercises, an evaluation form, and suggested royalty-free one act plays.) (HTH)

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# EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: DRAMA FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL/JUNIOR HIGH

By

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CS 504443

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: DRAMA FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL/JUNIOR HIGH

When basics and fun are integrated together in a drama unit, the last six to seven weeks of the year in 7th grade Language Arts class can be very conducive to learning. Keeping in mind that spring is a difficult time of the year to introduce any new concepts to the students, I decided to write and develop a drama unit in which the students could receive a basic background in the elements of putting a theatrical production together and an appreciation of the theater arts by actually producing and performing in one-act plays.

Finding four non-royalty plays for four classes each year, without repeating the same plays, isn't an easy task. Teenage Comedies for Amateur Stage, Play Magazine, and Catalog of Select Plays from Art Craft Company and Heuer Publishing Company have been valuable resources in this area. I basically select and tailor the plays chosen for each particular class on the basis of the abilities exhibited by the students in those classes. Comedies seem to work very well for this age group.

Having essentially no budget to work with has been somewhat of a problem, but asking the students to donate 25¢-50¢ apiece to buy stage make-up and other items has helped to defray costs. Also, being able to use the high school's flats has been helpful, although it's not a necessity in junior high productions. The absence of flats necessitates increased creativity on the students' part.

The average number of students in each of my classes is 25. While the prospect of having this many junior high students actively involved in some phase of theatrical production might appear appalling at face value, I have found that it can be a benefit. By using teams of two, three or four, students can pool their

special talents to produce an even better product, when working on a particular aspect of the production.

The team teaching approach is conducive to the teaching of this unit. The addition of an extra, enthusiastic professional can be very useful when expertise and personalities mesh well. This will not always be the case, however. I should point out that such a relationship is necessary if the teaming is to be a success. Surprisingly, the number of students to be added from an additional class can be a definite plus. By combining another class with one's own class, not only are there more people to try out for speaking parts, but there are larger groups of students to work on various production crews.

Being close to a university provides the advantages of having guest speakers and guest demonstrations in various aspects of stage make-up, lighting, etc. when teaching the students about stage production. If a university is not available, similar outside sources of help can be found through contacting local or nearby community play houses, actors' workshops, and other similar organizations.

A time line of my play unit, from the beginning of the unit to production day, is presented below:

1. During the first week, basics of pantomime and improvisation are explained and practiced. The students then actively participate in individual and group presentations. The films "Why Man Creates", "Mime of Marcel Marceau", and "Pantomime of the Heart" are shown.
2. During the second week, students read through the plays at least two times, and then write definitions of vocabulary found in their particular plays. They are then quizzed over the vocabulary content later in the week. Tryouts are held and casts posted.

3. During the third week, a basic straight and old-age make-up demonstration is given by myself or a guest demonstrator from Iowa State University's Make-up Department. Crews are signed up after spending time in the auditorium learning stage direction and covering other areas such as lighting, sets, costuming, and duties of various crews. Character analyses are assigned, testing over stage direction and terms takes place, and then, having accomplished this, we are ready for reading rehearsal.

4. The following two to three weeks involves everyone in numerous activities such as blocking and rehearsing the plays; designing and building the sets; designing posters, programs, and reserve seating arrangements; deciding on various costuming, props, and make-up to be used; writing press releases; and getting lighting and sound coordinated.

5. During the final week, two days of dress rehearsal are given, and the the unit climaxes with the final performances of our four plays being given on the same day to audiences involving all the student body, parents, friends, and senior citizens.

6. The next day we "strike" the stage and return all costumes and props. Then we have our own "Academy Awards" ceremony with the students voting on "Best Play" overall, "Best Actor and Actress" overall, and "Best Actor and Actress" from their own play. They also evaluate the play production unit--telling me what they liked or disliked about it, and what could be improved to make the unit a better one.

This play unit is very easy to incorporate into a Language Arts curriculum because many of the basic skills taught during the year are reinforced throughout the unit.

Among the numerous skills that are reinforced is the development of vocabulary through the acquisition and use of new theatrical terminology. Spelling skills are strengthened, in that, spelling words are taken from the various terms the students are using. Reading comprehension is worked on through joint reading exercises and questions to develop thorough understanding of the plays. Analytical thinking and writing skills are enhanced when, as part of the unit, the students are required to write in-depth character analyses, make-up analyses, and newspaper releases.

In these times of increasing calls for accountability in education, a unit such as mine must still be evaluated through some systematic means. For my unit, several devices are used to meet this need.

An evaluation form is filled out weekly by the students on each other's performances during that time and then turned into me. The Stage Manager is responsible for evaluating the heads of the crews and the heads of the crews are responsible for evaluating the crew members. In similar manner, the Student Director evaluates the actors and actresses, while the instructor evaluates the Stage Manager and the Student Director. Through the use of performance grades and quiz and test scores from in-class presentations on theater (i.e. stage make-up, lighting, stage direction, and terminology), the instructor has good evaluation tools. Through these means, I see this play unit as being an integral part of my Language Arts program.

One major benefit of my unit is that the students are able to reinforce and apply the Language Arts skills learned throughout the year by putting them into practical application in this unit, as opposed to doing written exercises from a book.

One unexpected benefit is that students, who may otherwise have difficulty in experiencing success in more traditional, academic endeavors throughout the year, have consistently met with success in this drama unit. This feeling, in part, has

been generated by the students' older brothers and sisters who have, in many cases, "clued them in" to the unit. Another unexpected benefit is that many high school students are eager to help with my productions and serve as enthusiastic "teachers" to the junior high people.

This play production unit has proven capable of sparking enough interest in theater so that students may develop a lifelong interest and appreciation for the theater. Many former students have gone on to use the skills learned in this unit in high school productions, and even to pursue theatrical goals in college.

Finally, this unit provides the kind of activity that can be given considerable media coverage, resulting in the increased interest and support of the community, which is vital to all school districts.

Those last six to seven weeks of the school year, so often dreaded by many teachers and students alike, need not be! Indeed, I find them to be a time that I eagerly look forward to as being the high point of the school year!

APPENDICES

TRY-OUT SHEET

Name _____

Production Title _____

Grade _____

List in order of preference what role you want:

1.

2.

3.

Check any/all backstage crews you would like to be on:

| | |
|---|---|
| ____ Set Crew | ____ Props |
| ____ Light Crew | ____ Prompter |
| ____ Costumes | ____ Sound Crew |
| ____ Make-Up | ____ Student Director |
| ____ Programs & Posers | ____ Stage Manager |

**********

Director's Comments

NAME _____

VOCABULARY QUIZ
"THAT'S A GOOD QUESTION"

1. _____ embargo
2. _____ flippant
3. _____ randomly
4. _____ consumer
5. _____ souffle'
6. _____ famished
7. _____ agitated
8. _____ ransacked
9. _____ irritable
10. _____ accomplice
11. _____ suspicious
12. _____ underestimate
13. _____ catering
14. _____ caviar
15. _____ radiant

a. very hungry
b. not listed
c. to value too low
d. smart or pert in speech, not respectful
e. persons providing a supply of food or supplies
f. person who aids another in committing a crime
g. by chance, with no plan
h. search thoroughly
i. persons who use a product grown or made by a producer
j. showing distrust
k. a fluffy baked dish, usually made with eggs
l. battle between two opposing forces
m. distubed or excited , arguing to arouse action
n. able to arouse impatience or anger
o. shining bright, beaming
p. restriction put on trade by law
q. salty relish made from eggs of sturgeon or other large fish

Name_____

Play Production Terms and Spelling

Fill in the blanks with the appropriate words and spell each of them correctly.

1. _____ dealing with mechanical aspects of the play

2. _____ practice session to prepare for public performance

3. _____ increase voice or actions so they will carry to audience

4. _____ a public presentation

5. _____ interprets the play

6. _____ movement and gestures without words

7. _____ light, amusing play with a happy ending

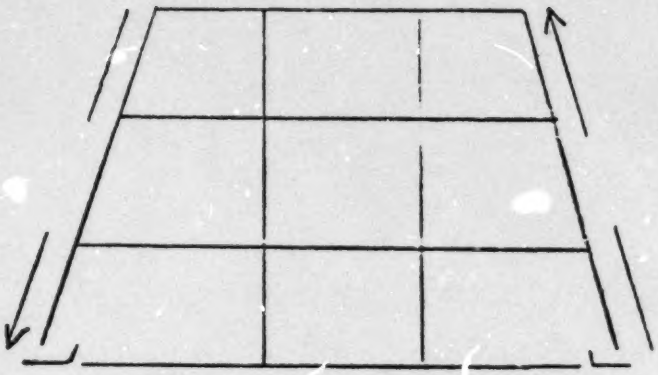
8. _____ you are given a situation in which you must make up dialogue and action as you play our the scene

9. _____ center all your attention on someone or something

10. _____ serious drama in which the hero can't overcome obstacles; usually sad ending

Name _____

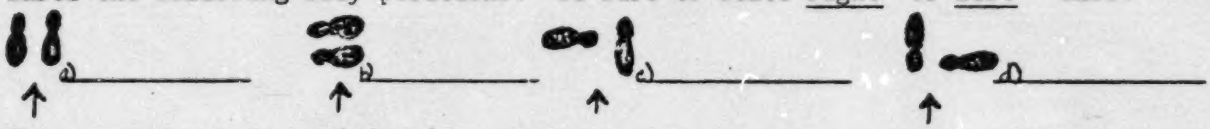
Play Production Test



1. Label the diagram with the correct stage directions.

2. Label upstage a and downstage b. ( in arrows )

3. Label the following body positions. Be sure to state right or left also.



a) _____ b) _____ c) _____ d) _____

4. The strongest body position is _____.

.....

Fill in the blanks with the appropriate terms and spell each of them correctly.

1. _____ practice session to prepare for public performance

2. _____ increase voice or actions so they will carry to the audience

3. _____ interprets the play

4. _____ movement and gestures without words

5. _____ you are given a situation in which you must make up dialogue and action as you play out the scene

.....

1. Name two types of make-up base that we can use.

(1). _____ (2). _____

2. Name 4 major items we can use to make up a person for a stage production.

(1) _____ (2). _____

(3) _____ (4). _____

3. Why do we use powder after we make up an actor?

4. List the six basic steps in make-up application:

(1). _____ (4). _____
(2). _____ (5). _____
(3). _____ (6). _____

Matching.

1. _____ to take attention away from another actor
2. _____ area farthest away from the audience
3. _____ one of the persons in the play
4. _____ an assembly of listeners or spectators
5. _____ area closest to the audience
6. _____ a stage setting; a division of one act in a play
7. _____ cues given to actors who forget their lines, using a medium voice, not a whisper
8. _____ any area where the audience can see you
9. _____ side view
10. _____ cosmetics for the face
11. _____ X - a directed movement on stage
12. _____ any area where the audience can't see you
13. _____ turn more of the actor's body toward the audience
14. _____ take down set and props after performance
15. _____ any item that can be carried on stage
16. _____ a way to "steal" - counter cross
17. _____ to be downstage
18. _____ to stand between another actor and the audience
19. _____ to be upstage
20. _____ area behind scenery not visible to audience
21. _____ directions, given by the director, to actors concerning their movements on stage

A. backstage
B. prompter
C. cross
D. not given
E. character
F. on stage
G. block
H. properties
I. below
J. steal
K. open up
L. technical
M. cover
N. make-up
O. ease-down
P. above
Q. downstage
R. off stage
S. scene
T. audience
U. upstage
V. profile
W. strike

22. List three stage crews and briefly explain their responsibilities:

1.

2.

3.

23. Explain the difference between a <u>hand</u> prop and a <u>set</u> prop. Be specific.

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Use the following to write a detailed analysis of your character. Base your analysis on a thorough reading the entire script.

1. Make a list of all of the adjectives that you can think of which might be used to decribe the character.

2. What is the character's relationship with the other major characters in the play?

3. Give a brief physical description of the character.

4. Can you think of someone who might look or act like your character?

5. What does the character say about himself/herself?

6. What do the other characters say about him/her?

7. Describe in detail, the character's life form birth to the present (or even until death, if you prefer). Write about the life he or she has lived and give specific details of their background.

8. Start a list of facts about your character.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS SHEETS ARE DUE ON _____.

THIS IS ALSO YOUR LINE DATE -----HAVE YOUR LINES MEMORIZED!

## MAKE-UP CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Find the answers to this list of questions before you begin to develop your make-up. Write an analysis of your character by finding the answers in the script.

1. Who is this character?
2. How old is this character?
3. How tall is this character?
4. Does this character have any unusual features? If so, specify.
5. In what things is this character most interested?
6. What does this character do in his/her spare time?
7. Does this character dress neatly or carelessly?
8. What is the character's posture like?
9. What education has this character had? His/Her occupation?
10. Is this character in good health? If not, what is the cause of their illness?
11. What kind of disposition does this character have?
12. What is the character's personality?
13. Is this character single, married or divorced? Any children?
14. What kind of life has this character had? In what kind of home does he/she live?

Consider the heredity, race, environment, and sex of this character when designing the make-up for him/her.

EVALUATION FORM

Evaluate each member of your crew using this scale:

0 = Did Nothing
1 = Average
2 = Did a Lot

Name of Crew Member being evaluated: _____

This crew member:

1. Shows cooperative attitude toward crew duties, and willingness to work.

0 1 2

2. Carries out responsibility on time.

0 1 2

3. Contributes ideas, effort (input).

0 1 2

4. Is dependable.

0 1 2

5. Follows directions, cooperates with you.

0 1 2

6. Cooperates with other crew members.

0 1 2

7. Does fair share; doesn't leave duties to everybody else.

0 1 2

Additonal Comments:

Your class period 1 2 4 6 7 (Circle yours)

Best actor (from your play) _____

Best actress (from your play) _____

Best play (overall) _____

Best actor (overall) _____

Best actress (overall) _____

Comments on the play unit:

Your class period 1 2 4 6 7 (Circle yours)

Best actor (from your play) _____

Best actress (from your play) _____

Best play (overall) _____

Best actor (overall) _____

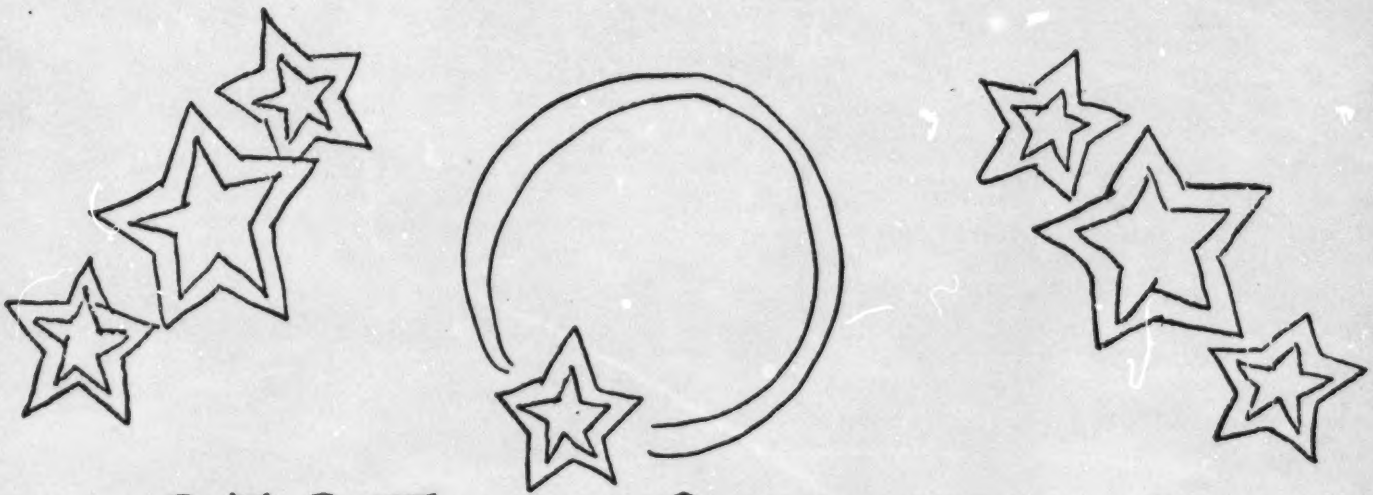
Best actress (overall) _____

Comments on the play unit:

# BEST ACTOR

_____ is hereby awarded this certificate for superior acting.

_____ Date _____ Signature



# BEST ACTRESS

_____ is hereby awarded this certificate for superior acting.

Some of the Plays that we have used successfully are:

Teenage Comedies for the Amateur Stage - Betty Tracy Huff

"Too Many Cooks"
"The Case of the Missing Masterpiece"
"Meet Mr. Murchinson"
"Chef's Special"

Plays Magazine

"Just Plain Folks" - Margaret Malkind
"A Test for Three Detectives" - John Murray
"The Haunting of Hathaway House" - John Murray

Selected Plays - Art Craft Company

Le Roma Greth - "Ghost for Rent"
"The Ghost at Punkin Holler"

Donald Payton - "He Tried With His Boots On"
"Life O' the Party"
"Foxy Grandma"

R. A. Anderson & R. L. Sweeney - "Run Robber Run"
"Boris and the Briefcase"

## RESOURCES

### Books


Corson, Richard. Stage Make-Up. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970.

Huff, Betty T. Teenage Comedies for the Amateur Stage. Boston, Mass.: Plays, Inc., 1968.

Hunt, Douglas and Kari. Pantomime: Silent Theater. New York: Atheneum, 1964.

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Speech 495: Teaching Speech Students. Effective Teaching Collection. Unpublished Resource Book. Iowa State University, 1978.

Tanner, Fran A. Basic Drama. Pocatello, Idaho: Clark Publishing Co., 1972.

Tanner, Fran A. Creative Communication. Pocatello, Idaho: Clark Publishing Co., 1972.


### Films


"Mime of Marcel Marceau". Learning Corporation of America, 1972.

"Pantomime of the Heart". Encyclopaedia Britannica Educational Corporation, 1975.

"Why Man Creates". Pyramid, 1968.


### Periodicals


Catalog of Select Plays. Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Art Craft Play Company.

Catalog of Select Plays. Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Heuer Publishing Company.

Plays, The Drama Magazine for Young People. Boston, Mass.: Plays, Inc.


### Speakers and Demonstrations

Iowa State University Theater Department. Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa.